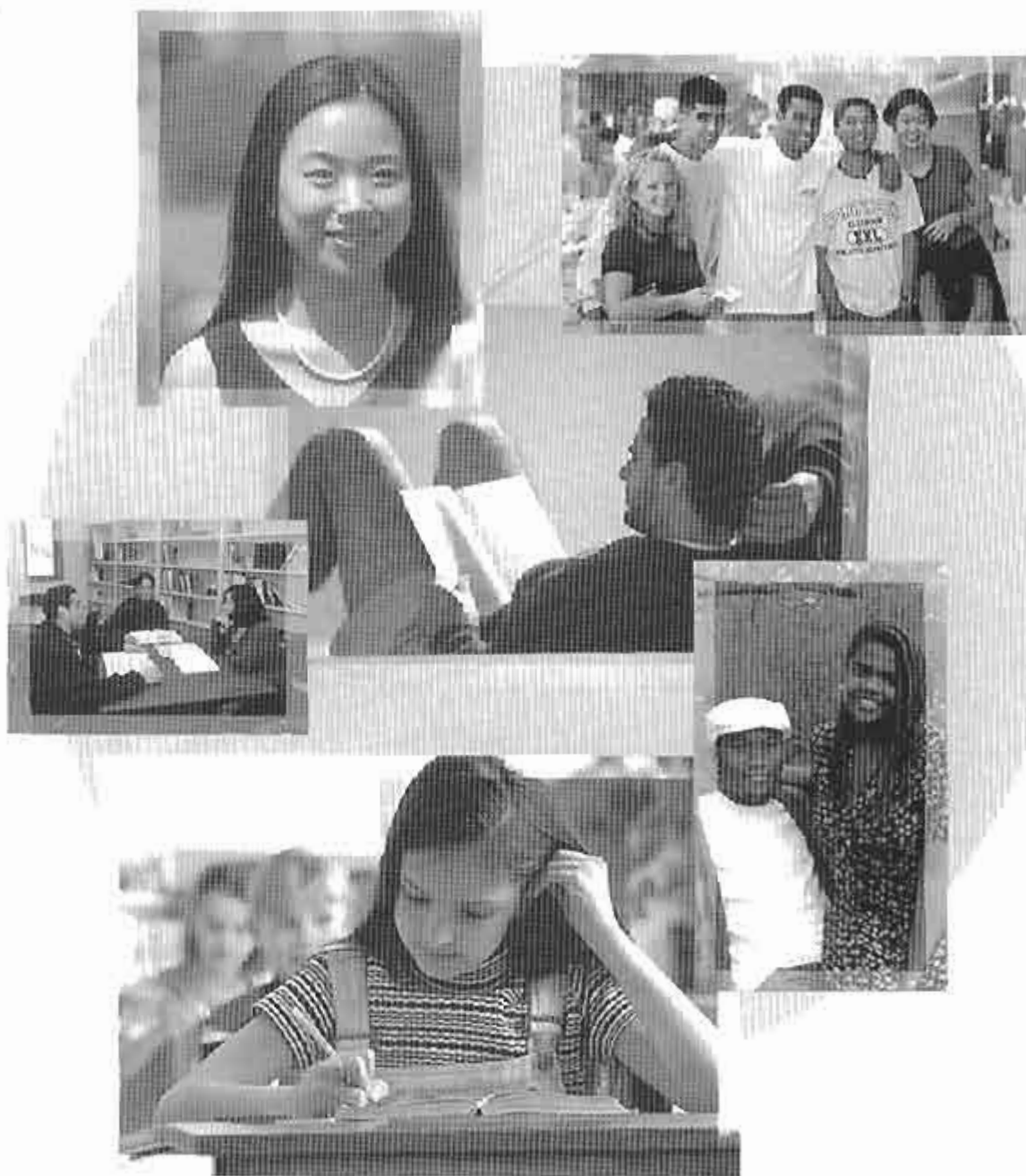


## Completing the Circle:



## Theory to Practice in Educational Psychology Research

Volume XXIX  
Number 3

Issue Editors:  
Nancy DeFrates-Densch  
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## Completing the Circle: Theory to Practice in Educational Psychology Research

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# Completing the Circle: Theory to Practice in Educational Psychology Research

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## Introduction

Júlio Rique  
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Educational psychology is generally considered to be the study of human learning processes, research, teaching, and practice in educational settings. Psychology as a major discipline in social sciences became very specialized along its history of development. Currently, the American Psychological Association (APA – <http://www.apa.org>) lists 53 active divisions corresponding to areas of specialization.

Educational Psychology is Division 15. Each division has subdivisions usually called “areas of interest.” Specialization brings diversity of options. The thematic motif of each educational psychologist is a marriage between personal interests and one of the subdivisions of the discipline. For example, some educational psychologists are interested in researching the quality of social environments conducive to optimal human learning. Others might be interested in examining the influence of biological maturation on the learning processes. Yet, it is common to find educational psychologists engaged in the study of specific concepts areas such as algebra, giftedness, language, resilience, notions of justice, etc.

In this issue of *Thresholds in Education*, we explore the work being generated by educational psychology faculty and faculty associates at Northern Illinois University. Our goal is to motivate teachers to work with us in collaborative processes or become educational psychologists themselves. This edition includes nine articles addressing a diversity of topics. The authors were asked to contribute to this issue by presenting their individual interests with “a message for

teachers.”

Briefly, three articles discuss issues related to adolescence in the context of schools. The article by Schmidt discusses academic resilience among adolescents. She defines resilience as successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances. She believes that teachers can promote such resilience to prepare youth to deal with adversities in life. Rique’s

article addresses the problem of students’ victimization in school from the perspective of moral development and education. He believes that teacher education should provide training on how teachers should use justice and forgiveness to resolve ethical and moral conflicts in schools.

Shumow’s article discusses work regarding parental involvement in

their children’s schooling. She offers ways in which school can facilitate such involvement, including parent education programs.

Four articles address teaching practices for better learning performances. DeFrates-Densch presents the importance of meeting the needs of gifted adolescents in schools. She invites participation in her current line of inquiry—the relation between academic challenge and motivation among gifted middle school students. She believes that teachers can be educated to adjust instruction to increase the level of challenge and therefore motivation for gifted students.

Jean Pierce discusses “Learner-Centered Principles” in relation to teacher beliefs about practices linked with student perceptions of those practices and motivation. Teachers believe that “their preferred

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practice” leads to better learning. However, it is students’ perception of that practice that motivates learning. Then, teachers should implement practices that match with students’ perception of the effectiveness of teaching styles. Pierce proposes that problem-based learning encourages students to engage in learning processes that match their preference—thus an ideal practice of teaching.

An article by Stellwagen is specific about mental abilities. He discusses the use of student learning profiles to enhance metacognition among high school students. Metacognition is generally defined as the ability to think abstractly across different content areas. Stellwagen presents us with a case study of his experience and application of the model. Roberts’ article presents us with alternatives. He discusses “the multi-state mind,” a model that according to him will offer future possibilities of education.

Finally, one article addresses parenting styles and education. Smith introduces a website established for parents regarding effective parenting of adolescents. The website offers review of parenting self-help books and invites participation. An article by Shimizu offers a culture perspective to education. He provides us with implications of learning philosophies in Japanese and American schools.

It is our hope that you will find the work of these individuals interesting and informative. Should you

desire information regarding the Educational Psychology programs at Northern Illinois University, please contact Jean Pierce at (815) 753-8470.

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*Júlio Rique is Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology. He is a research associate of the Office of Studies on Moral Development and Education, University of Illinois-Chicago. Dr. Rique’s research involves adolescents’ moral reasoning of justice and forgiveness. Currently, Dr. Rique coordinates an International Project on the Enright Forgiveness Inventory. Dr. Rique works in collaboration with researchers in Brazil and has presented papers in national and international conferences. He has also reviewed and written articles in international journals of psychology.*

*Nancy DeFrates-Densch is an Instructor of Educational Psychology at Northern Illinois University, where she has been teaching for the past 12 years. She has presented numerous papers at state and national conferences and has published several journal articles. She is a contributing author for McGraw-Hill and has served as a content advisor for them as well. Her past work includes substance abuse counseling for adolescents and their families. In addition, she served her local school district for many years as a board of education member and member of the gifted education committee.*

# Interpersonal Forgiveness and Students' Victimization in Middle Schools

Júlio Rique  
Northern Illinois University

Awareness of the increasing number of student victimization incidents in our nation's middle and secondary schools has led to many cries for a renewed emphasis on moral and character education. Presidents Clinton and G. W. Bush have both given character education a prominent place in major education policy addresses, and both have sponsored White House conferences on character education. A growing curriculum literature offers conflict resolution programs and mediation strategies focused particularly on child-on-child victimization. These programs are based on assumptions that teachers should foster improved problem-solving and communication skills and respect for ethical-humanitarian principles of conduct. If these approaches fail, however, the only action left to educational authorities is constraint or punishment for the identified offender. Although these typical recommendations may seem sensible, I believe that they are incomplete. Public schools are wary of any recommendation that may undermine clear standards of justice or fair treatment

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***Forgiveness provides  
educators with an approach  
that can better achieve  
restorative social relations.***

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of all students; thus, they ignore one creative response to a conflict event—forgiveness.

As an educational psychologist whose primary research interest is in identifying the conditions under which adolescents achieve positive development, I believe that the value of forgiveness, unlike justice, has lost its status as a principle of social relations outside the church or family. Forgiveness after an outbreak of conflict and even violence in schools should support

victims and avoid blame and isolation for the offenders. My research in cross-cultural studies in collaboration with colleagues from Brazil and several other countries has convinced me that, in facing the victimization problem in our schools, forgiveness provides educators with an approach that can better achieve restorative social relations.

## **What is the Problem? Students' Victimization and Teachers' Conflict of Values**

The National Center for Education Statistics (2001) reported that students between ages 12 and 18 are frequently victims of non-fatal victimization. These offenses include verbal aggression, neglect, social isolation, thievery, and physical fights. This broad definition of victimization complicates the responsibilities of schools. This is because the victimization in behaviors as previously described is intrinsic to conflict that naturally occurs during adolescence. The educational/developmental psychologist, Jean Piaget, well defined this standpoint:

Social/interpersonal conflicts *can* promote intellectual and moral development in the child/adolescent. Social/interpersonal conflicts *are necessary* for the development of logic and the ability for taking the perspective of others as having feelings, ideas, and desires. (Piaget, 1928/1976, 1932/1997, in DeVries & Zan, 1994, p. 80, emphasis added)

Considering that conflicts cannot be eradicated from within the range of normal relationships in school experiences, schools should foster developmental growth equally for victims and offenders. Usually, schools address conflict by bracketing the situation from the interpersonal context in which the conflict initiated by focusing on protecting victims only. This often means limiting a developmental approach for both parties involved. That all parties should be involved in

resolving the conflict should be understood within developmental (the person) and contextual settings including the family, school, and community.

Teachers are often in the midst of conflicts involving students, parents, and schools. Teachers are constantly exposed to a student's interpersonal conflicts in the classroom or in the school building. Teachers also report that they are not properly prepared to respond to conflicting situations (Tirri, 1999). Interestingly, interpersonal conflicts between students create an intra-individual conflict of values in teachers. Not knowing how to deal with the situation, teachers face

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competing claims of values such as justice, care, forgiveness, etc., to resolve conflicts at schools (Oser, 1991). Therefore, I believe that decision-making processes involving democratic dialogues can balance *forgiveness* and *justice*. When everyone is granted the chance to participate and justify their attitudes, adopted strategies for resolution will be acceptable across contexts (i.e., peers, school, family, community). This would shift the attention to the differences in developmental outcomes for adolescents (DeVries & Zan, 1994; Laursen & Collins, 1994).

In my research, I am challenged to provide an account for how principles of interpersonal forgiveness and justice are congruent. How could interpersonal forgiveness relate to a form of justice that would not simply excuse a young person from accepting responsibility for his/her actions but would avoid employing punishment that closes the opportunity for conflict resolution? Education can provide *support* and *recognition* for moral actions (i.e., being just) and values (i.e., forgiveness). My previous research findings have begun to verify the value of forgiveness. Currently, I am working on a conceptual link between forgiveness and justice.

## Research on Interpersonal Forgiveness

At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a group coordinated by Robert D. Enright, Ph.D., educational psychologist, pioneered studies on interpersonal forgiveness. The group departed from a literature review that showed almost no publications about the theme in psychology. The first decision from the group was to develop a working definition for interpersonal forgiveness based on the philosophy of Joanna North (1987). The research team defined forgiveness as:

A willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly injured us while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her. (Enright, Freedman & Rique, 1998, pp. 46-47)

## Measure

Enright and the Human Development Group then went on to create a measure for the definition of interpersonal forgiveness. The Enright Forgiveness Inventory (EFI)<sup>1</sup> was created as an objective Attitude Scale that assesses *the degree to which a person forgives another person who unjustly hurt him or her*. The EFI provides information about the degree of hurt, the agent of hurt, and the degree to which a person has forgiven the offender in the areas of affect, behavior, and cognition. I refer the reader to Enright, Rique & Coyle (2000), Enright & Fitzgibbons (2002), and Subkoviak, Enright, Wu, Gassin, Freedman, Olson & Sarinopoulos (1995) for a review of the development and the statistical properties of the EFI. I am currently a coordinator of the International Project of Studies on Interpersonal Forgiveness using the Enright Forgiveness Inventory (EFI). The EFI is now available in seven languages with norms and analyses from Austria, Brazil, Israel, Korea, Norway, Taiwan, and the United States.

Studies using the EFI are accumulating in three primary areas.

1. *Forgiveness Counseling and Education: Social Emotions and Health*. Across cultures, it appears that when a person forgives, anger expression, anxiety, and depression are significantly reduced (Rique, 1999; Sarinopoulos, 1996), and blood pressure (Huang, 1990) and cardiac stress are reduced (Waltman, 2002) as compared to another person who



forgives to a lesser extent. Short-term educational interventions in which the process model of forgiving was applied have shown that forgiveness promotes well-being for adolescents hurt by “emotionally-distant” parents (Al Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995).

2. *The Influence of Contexts of Hurt on the Degree of Forgiveness.* Rique and Enright (1998) analyzed offenses reported by college students and adults across four cultures: Austria, Brazil, Taiwan, and the United States. Findings showed that offenses were perpetrated in developmentally appropriate contexts including the family, friendships, and romantic partners. In those contexts, participants’ perceptions of “hurt” varied significantly across similar categories of offenses. Offenses were usually related to everyday issues such as romantic conflicts, lack of trust between friends, borrowing money, etc. These offenses usually involved behaviors such as verbal aggression or emotional neglect. It was concluded that the percep-

## **The Need for Further Research on the Conceptual Link between Forgiveness and Justice**

As mentioned in the Introduction, forgiveness in education cannot be used to diminish or trump the claims of justice. The challenge for educators is to find a model of reasoning and practical application in public education that relates forgiveness with justice. The perception of injustice, after all, originates the very need for forgiveness (i.e., victimization). Authors have appropriately defined the morality of justice (Piaget, 1932/1997; Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Enright & The Human Development Group, 1991) distinct from the morality of forgiveness. However, they stress that the relationship of justice and forgiveness should not be perceived as “either—or” but as “co-existence” of independent forms of ethical/moral reasoning about conflicts. In agreement with the argument of independence of constructs, I have considered the possibility of

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### ***The challenge for educators is to find a model of reasoning and practical application in public education that relates forgiveness with justice.***

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tion of hurt varies. People perceive hurt from others who are close to them such as family members, friends, and colleagues more than people perceive hurt from strangers. On the other hand, the degree to which participants forgive offenders indicated that victims were more likely to forgive people who were close to them than they were likely to forgive strangers.

3. *Forgiveness and Religion.* Cross-cultural studies on forgiveness indicated that religion, measured as practice of faith, has a moderate correlation with forgiveness (Rique, 1999; Subkoviak, et al., 1995). Stronger relationships were found in cases where a religious person was more likely to forgive strangers than would a non-religious person. Jennifer Hood’s manuscript investigated forgiveness in a sample of middle school students in relation to religious affiliation in early adolescence. Initial findings showed that religious education and practice of religiosity across three different affiliations (Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish) had no effect on the degree to which adolescents forgave others after conflicts with friends, family, or teachers.

developing a model of co-existence implying that independent constructs stem from the same moral root. That argument should consequently be useful for discussion and research on personal moral development and public actions in terms of mercy and justice.

What would that argument be like? According to Piaget’s (1932/1997) model of moral development, forgiveness emerges from “the morality of autonomy and cooperation.” A person comes to understand that the eye-for-an-eye rule leads to a cycle of revenge. Reciprocity, a more advanced moral perspective of forgiveness, becomes associated with equity, an advanced concept of justice. Piaget thinks that this association is made because of two related cognitive capabilities of the human mind. First is the capacity to think of forgiveness in the complex terms of reciprocity and, second the capacity to think in complex terms of advanced forms of retribution as equity. If Piaget is right that a person is capable of relating the two concepts into one form of reasoning that simultaneously motivates “merciful judgments of justice” and the “supererogatory action of forgiving,” educators have the responsibility to reintegrate a more balanced

approach to victimization events by recognizing and nurturing forgiveness in all parties in conflicts.

The Rique and Lins-Dyer study (in press) showed that the schools protect student victims and value when the student (victim) forgives offenders. However, an offender often receives no protection despite his acceptance of responsibility and request for forgiveness. Many are understandably left with anger. Then, what is the moral benefit of forgiveness for offenders? Piaget would say that although an adolescent could function in high levels of moral and ethical behaviors, one-sided justice models burden both adolescent victims and offenders in schools with an unfair weight on deliberation. If punishment exceeds the violation, a young person's understanding of right and wrong will be impeded by the emergence of a sense of injustice. Or, if forgiveness exceeds the rights of justice, a young person's understanding of right and wrong will be impeded by egocentrism.

#### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> If readers are interested in the EFI, they should contact the International Forgiveness Institute at <http://www.forgiveness-institute.org>, P. O. Box 6153, Madison, WI 53716-0153., or email [jnr@niu.edu](mailto:jnr@niu.edu) for information. Finally, readers might refer to the website, <http://wwwcedu.niu.edu/~rique> for further inquiries on specific research issues.

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